

## A DECADE OF DEMOCRATIC SURVIVAL: IMPLICATION FOR THE NIGERIAN POLITICAL PROCESS.

S.M. Omodia

Department of Political Science and Public Admin, Adekunle Ajasin University, P.M.B.001 Akungba-Akoko,  
Ondo-State, Nigeria, West-Arica.

E-Mail: [omodiasstephen@gmail.com](mailto:omodiasstephen@gmail.com)

### ABSTRACT

This paper unfolds the dynamics and pattern of democratic governance in the Nigerian Fourth Republic which started in 1999. The paper through the use of Almond and Verba's conception of political culture discusses the political process through an analysis of the concept 'citizenship' and 'system capability'. The argument of the paper is that the political system manifest weak regulative and distributive mechanisms, coupled with poor political participation – factors which have been discussed to be dysfunctional to the survival of the system. Thus, the paper recommends major political reforms at the level of parties to enable for internal party democracy and the restructuring of electoral bodies to enable for their independence and to check unlawful interference from politicians.

**KEYWORDS:** Citizenship, distributive capability, militarization, political leadership, political manipulation, system capability, regulative capability.

### INTRODUCTION

The operation of representative democracy in Nigeria became more manifest and fashioned towards the modern style as a result of colonial interest in which democracy as a political system was not initially designed to be beneficial to the indigenous Nigerians, but, to serve as divisive mechanism between the educated elites and the traditional elites to the benefit of British colonial domination. This was coupled with the vision by the British to institute a political system that will persistently facilitate the exploitation of the Nigerian State even after the attainment of political independence.

The above point could best be understood by looking at the evolution of democracy vis-à-vis the working of the system in Nigeria, it would be recalled that the elective principle of 1923 introduced party democracy in the Nigerian body-politic through the implementation of the 1922 Clifford Constitution which only restricted party democracy to two cities in the South – Lagos and Calabar, while the North was legislated for through proclamation. The implication is that the Nigerian State was designed to manifest geographical divide between mass-elite, especially with the income qualification of one hundred pounds for political participation in the Clifford Constitution and fifty pounds for political participation in the Macpherson Constitution of 1946 (Crowder 1968, Nwosu et al 1998).

Thus, geographical politicking and primitive monetization of the democratic process have continued to play a major role in Nigeria's democracy to the disadvantage of the process. This no doubt has snowballed into a scenario where the Nigerian State has been characterized by political instability with negative impact on democratic norm and its process (Crowder 1968, Duddley 1982, Omodia 2003, Opara 2007). Conversely, with the unfolding events of the Nigerian Fourth Republic where civil rule seem to have survived the fragility of the political process than past republics, it is therefore indispensable to unfold the implication of such survival on Nigeria's democratic process. To be able to achieve this objective, the paper in addition to this introductory section, is sectionalized into: theoretical framework, identifying the impediments to democratic survival in the past, understanding democracy in the fourth republic, putting forth recommendations for a viable democratic process and concluding remarks.

### Theoretical Framework

Almond and Verba's conception of political culture is no doubt indispensable as a theoretical tool and framework for unfolding the Nigerian democratic system of the fourth republic. This is not only because democratic norm and principles in Nigeria for the past one decade has not been static, but dynamic, in the sense that the focus is on a greater integration of the people as part and parcel of the political system rather than the age long divide between government and the governed which over the years have characterized the political culture of the Nigerian State.

This is also coupled with the understanding that democracy and democratization is associated with the concept of economic development, poverty eradication, good governance among others (Omodia 2007a), which could be achieved and sustained in an atmosphere of democratic stability that is embedded in behavioural patterns that are functional to the system. Thus, the need for political behaviour or political culture to transform from primitive stage to an integrative form through enhanced political awareness both on the part of government officials and the governed.

This transformational process has been captured by Almond and Verba (1963) in their typology of political culture as:

- (i) Parochial Political Culture – The conception here is that the citizens tend to either be unaware or have a dim understanding of the existence of government and its structure, the resultant effect of which is poor political participation on the part of the people. That is, the governmental process is not people- centred.
- (ii) Subject Political Culture – A subject political culture is that in which there is a gap between the government and the governed just like what is obtainable in parochial. The major difference however is that in the case of subject culture, the people are aware of government and its structure, but such awareness is restricted to the perception of non participation in governance on the part of the people.
- (iii) Participant Political Culture – This type of culture just like the name suggest focuses on a vivid understanding of governmental machinery and the active participation of the citizenry in the governmental process.

As earlier stated, the justification for the use of Almond and Verba's theoretical conception as a tool of analysis, notwithstanding the criticisms of western orientation and years of existence (Ake 1982, Nwoko 1988), is anchored on the drive by nation-state on participatory governmental system as an integral part of good governance. This no doubt is shared by the Nigerian state.

From the above background therefore, the question that comes to mind is: to what extent is the Nigerian democratic system of the fourth republic propelled by a participant political culture? This question is no doubt indispensable considering the fact that one of the major impediments to political stability in Nigeria is the wide gap that tends to exist between government officials and the masses in successive regimes.

Impediments to Democratic Survival in the Past Republics

The factors that served as impediments to democratic stability in the past republics in Nigeria could be said to be multi-faceted. However, this paper is focused on the two central factors of poor political leadership and militarization of governance.

(1) Poor Political Leadership – Although this factor especially in the first republic was a function of colonial domination as a result of the bourgeoisification of the process of elite recruitment by the colonial masters which made the emergent leaders not to be focused and primitive in the utilization of power (Omodia 2003, Dauda 2006). Primitive political governance persisted after the first republic irrespective of regime type (military or civilian) with the obnoxious accumulation and utilization of national wealth for selfish and class interest. Thus, it has been argued that there is hyphen and buckle between poor political leadership and political instability (Omodia 2004, Omodia 2006, Omodia, 2007b, Wilmot 2007) which have manifested in form of abortion of republics through coups and counter coups.

However, the consternating scenario is that poor political leadership persisted even after coups that brought about military regimes as corrective governments. Thus, the questions that come to mind are: (1) why did military regimes in Nigeria become associated with poor political leadership considering that it constituted one of the factors they sought to correct? (2) Why has civil government failed to learn from the mistakes of the past in terms of unfocused leadership? In answering the first question, Dinneya (2006) identified three main factors as propelling military interventions: these are: (1) the lack of clearly defined national interest (2) the nature of post colonial military (3) poor electoral process and constitutional authority. He therefore argued that the military do not possess the structure and orientation to serve as a corrective regime because of its institutional values which are antithetical to democratic norms (Dinneya, 2006).

Civilian regimes on the other hand, have not been able to learn from the mistakes of the past because of such factors as poor political culture, poverty, the utilization of political power for creating economic base among others. The result is poor political leadership snowballing into a state of topsy-turvy which is hygienic or serve as a justification for the termination of the system by hasty and ambitious military officers (Ibaba 2007, Yamma 2008). A typical example could be found in the abortion of the Nigerian Second Republic in 1983 and to a great extent the aborted Third Republic.

2. Militarization Effect – The effect of long years of military dictatorship in the Nigerian body politic has created distortions in democratic values, lack of submissiveness to people's will, the lack of connect between the people and the government in terms of political participation. These ugly features characterizes civil governance in Nigeria in that there is a wide gap between the people and the political process as regards political participation. From the above perspective, the notion of the militarization of civil governance is viewed as a mechanism for governmental rather than for system survival. This involves the utilization of the military to check spontaneous civil reactions from the public as a result of their inability to access the governmental process. Thus, governmental support is not anchored on the people but on the use of force. This to a great extent portrays such a civilian regime as weak and lacking the capability to govern the State which the military often tend to use to its advantage.

Conversely, while this paper is of the conception that the factors associated with political instability in the past could be said to be multi-faceted, the point however is that, if political leadership had been well focused and not distorted by greed, selfishness, corruption, personal ambition among others and the democratic process deeply rooted in the people rather than in militarization and thuggery, perhaps other factors would have been so minimal to threaten or subvert democratic stability in Nigeria.

Democracy in the Fourth Republic

The focus here is that, if the factor of poor political leadership and militarization served as impediments to democratic survival before the fourth republic, what is the scenario in the fourth republic? To be able to unfold the scenario, this section discusses democracy in the Nigerian Fourth Republic from the perspective of citizenship and system capability.

Citizenship – The concept citizenship here is synonymous with equality. It is viewed from the perspective in which citizens could be said to have equal access to the political process in terms of political rights and participation. The questions here are: are Nigerians discriminated against especially as regards contesting for elective political offices? What is the nature of the discrimination and what implication does it have on the level of political participation?

On observational basis the political process is operated in such a way that there are restrictions in political participation especially in contesting elective offices. This is often expressed or manifested in form of geographical restrictions or through the monetization of the process which favours the rich. As regard geographical restriction, the 1999 transitional presidential election was restricted to the South in term of contest, when both the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) and All Peoples Party (APP) fielded candidates from the South. The same scenario was repeated in 2007 when the major political parties fielded Northern candidates in line with the concept of power shift. The implication therefore is that the emergence of quality leadership is compromised and it thus aid the mutual suspicion that exists between the North and the South, which is definitely not hygienic for democratic survival. The situation is worse-off in intra-State or in federating units where appointments tend to be zoned and persons discriminated against for belonging to a section of the State or outside it. This situation to a great extent has threatened the corporate existence of the Nigerian State, especially with the development in Plateau State which snowballed into the Jos 2001 ethno-religious crisis and the eventual declaration of a state of emergency.

As regard the restrictions on the part of the poor masses in terms of political participation based on the manipulation of the political process by the rich, the political process of the fourth republic is such that without huge financial backing political office aspirants cannot contest for elective posts, thereby, restricting political contest to the rich. The process is also designed in such a way that money bag politicians could subvert the will of the poor electorate through electoral rigging with the support of the officials of the electoral body, the security agents and even with the collaboration of opposing party agents, especially when money is involved (Aper, 2008).

In other words, most Nigerians are shut out of the democratic process as contestants because they do not have the means (money) to contest, and at the same time, shut out as electorate because their votes are designed not to count if they do not favour pre-determined candidates. The effect is that governmental representatives in most cases are foisted on the people by the process which tend to be unfair and creates politics of bitterness and thus, making the system a fragile one (Omodia, 2007c).

The second point for measuring the performance of democracy of the Nigerian Fourth Republic from the perspective of this paper is the system capability. By system capability, the focus is on the performance of the democratic system in terms of regulative and distributive mechanisms. In other words, the questions that come to mind are: (1) to what extent has the system been able to institute acceptable democratic norms as part of the political behaviour of the Nigerian people? (2) What are the practical benefits of democratic governance to Nigerians especially after a decade of uninterrupted civil governance?

As regard acceptable political norms, there is no doubt that political party is one of the political institutions saddled with the function of providing functional political education in a competitive party democracy has a lot to play in this regard. Conversely, unfolding events in the Nigerian Fourth Republic has shown that the parties are not well instituted to perform functional political education as a result of their elitist nature and lack of ideological base (Bello, 2008).

In addition, such regulative institution such as the police, the electoral body, and the judiciary which are supposed to be politically neutral have also been involved in dysfunctional politicking that have marred the credibility of the democratic process. While the activities of the police and the electoral body to a large extent tend to serve as tool for political manipulation by the party in power (Aper, 2008), the judiciary in some cases have been able to defend the political will of the people in states like Edo, Ondo, Anambra to mention a few and thus portraying itself as an institution of hope for reforming democratic behaviour.

From the background of restricted access into the political process, coupled with poor regulative mechanism for acceptable democratic norm and practice the question as earlier stated is, of what benefit is a decade of enduring democracy to the Nigerian State? While it could be stated that the Nigerian State is still bedeviled with the problems of poor service delivery in the area of roads, power supply, health facility among others (Ntalaja 2000, Oluwi 2009), the fact however is that, ten years of uninterrupted democratic experiment is providing Nigerians with the opportunity of talking electoral representation and thus focusing on the need for electoral reform as a way of strengthening democracy. That is, Nigerians now believe that the solution to socio-economic problems lies in democratic stability by focusing on the need to institute appropriate electoral reforms that would make governance to derive power from the people rather than providing opportunities for the emergence of corrective military regimes that were disappointing in the past.

In addition, enduring democratic process in the Nigerian Fourth Republic is also providing the Nigerian State the opportunity to break-off from a militarized orientation to emphasizing on the rule of law, appreciating the workings of the democratic organs and process as one which is consultative and embedded in accountability, transparency and checks and balances where the organs and tiers of government must be partners even in disagreement on issues.

#### Towards a Viable Democratic Process

In order for the democratic process of the present republic to practically impact on Nigerians, there is need for a genuine reform of the process in which the system would be built and sustained by the people through an elite-mass integrative mechanism. This could be done in a holistic form through the following means:

- (a) Political parties are internally reformed to embrace internal democracy and in which functional political participation start at that level through inputs made in the selection of party candidates, genuine mobilization based on party ideology and programme as well as making the people to be stakeholders of parties through financial contributions rather than being hijacked by the money bags. This no doubt will create equal access into the process.
- (b) The present electoral reform should be restructured in such a manner that will be responsive to the need of the people by allowing for separation of powers between the politicians in power and the electoral body. In

other words, in addition to security of tenure, the office of the Chairman of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) and the Resident Electoral Commissioners of the State Independent Electoral Commission (SIEC) should be occupied through a career structure that allow a professional career officer of the electoral bodies to aspire to the top through merit, hard work, and career achievement rather than through politicization which has proven to be hampering electoral neutrality.

#### CONCLUSION

The major difference between democracy and any form of dictatorial government is that while dictatorship as a regime type is protected through the use of force, the survival of democracy is anchored on its protection by the people. Thus, the need for a functional democratic socialization process that would serve as bedrock of Nigeria's democracy and not the dragging of Nigerians by a few into a process that is non-integrative.

The point therefore is that, there is hope that the present democratic experiment in Nigeria would impact positively on the people both economically and politically if the process is integrative.

#### REFERENCES

- Ake, C. (1982). *Social Science as Imperialism: The Theory of Political Development*. Ibadan: Ibadan University Press
- Almond G. and Verba, S. (1963). *The Civic Culture*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Aper, J.O. (2008). Political attitudes, political manipulation and election in Nigeria: The role of politicians and security agents In: S.M. Omodia (ed) *Managing Elections in Nigeria* Pp. 126 – 135 Keffi: Onaivi Publishing Press.
- Bello, K. (2008). *Ideological Bankruptcy in the Political Practice of Nigeria: Genesis, Magnitude and Consequences*. Keffi: AMD Designs and Communications.
- Crowder, M. (1968). *West Africa under Colonial Rule*. Benin City: Ethiope Publishing Corporation.
- Dauda, S. (2006). *Nigeria's Foreign Policy*. Ibadan: Daily Graphics Nig.Ltd.
- Dinneya, G. (2006). *Political Economy of Democratization in Nigeria*. Lagos: Concept Publications Limited.
- Duddley, B. (1982). *An Introduction to Nigerian Government and Politics*. London: Macmillan Press Limited.
- Ibaba, I.S. (2007). Elections and the crisis of democratic practice in Nigeria. *J.Soc Pol Iss.* 4 (1): 12 – 15.
- Ntalaja, G.N. (2000). *Democracy and Development in Africa*. Abuja: African Centre for Democratic Governance.
- Nwoko, M.I. (1988). *Basic World Political Theories*. Owerri: Claretian Institute of Philosophy.
- Nwosu, N.I., Olaniyi, J.O. and Oyedele, S.O. (1998). *An Introduction to Constitutional Development*. Ibadan: Sunad Publisher Limited.
- Oluwi, V.A. (2009). Nigeria: failed behemoth or giant of Africa? *This Day Newspaper* 30th July, P.19.
- Omodia, S.M. (2003). State and conflict management in the Nigerian fourth republic: a case for decadence or good governance. *Nas J. Hum* 1(1): 170 – 175.
- Omodia, S.M. (2004). The family as a vehicle for sustainable democracy in Nigeria. *J. Fam. Dev.* 1(1): 77 – 87.
- Omodia, S.M. (2006). Political leadership and democratic survival in the Nigerian fourth republic. *Ind. J. Mul. Res.* 2(2): 283 – 288.
- Omodia, S.M. (2007a). Governance and democratization in Africa: the Nigerian experience. *SOC. SC.* 2 (2): 134 – 138.

Omodia, S.M. (2007b). Poverty alleviation and sustainable democracy in Nigeria. *Unpublished Ph.D Thesis*. Submitted to the Department of Political Science, School of Post Graduate Studies, University of Abuja.

Omodia, S.M. (2007c). Party politics and political development in Nasarawa State (Nigeria): A Focus on the Nigerian Fourth Republic *J.Soc and Dev.* Stu 1(1): 40 – 46.

Opara, B. (2007). *June 12, 1993 Presidential Election*. Abuja: Subavic.

Wilmot, P. (2007). *Nigeria: The Nightmare Scenario (Intervention VII)* Lagos: Farafina.

Yamma, A.M. (2008). Elections in post-colonial civilian regimes in Nigeria In: S.M. Omodia (ed.) *Managing Elections in Nigeria* Pp. 18 – 27 Keffi: Onaivi Publishing Press.

Received for Publication: 01/10 /2010

Accepted for Publication: 10/11 /2010